Where Can We Find Refuge?

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:03:38

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Tonight I want to talk about the search for knowledge, or where can we find refuge.

At this point of the retreat, coming up on the midpoint, about twenty people are leaving at the end of this week. And for those who are staying, there's still a real sense that the retreat is about half over. I've noticed in quite a few of the interviews that the mind tends to move into a sort of assessment mode—evaluating, "Well, how am I doing? Have I got it? It's over and I have to leave, and did I really get it yet? Do I understand it all? Will I ever? How is my retreat going? It's not quite going in the way that I had planned." Ha! Big surprise.

But this is coming up a lot, and it makes me reflect on how for many years my own practice was—of course I was practicing to be free from suffering—but in some way, if I was asked, I would think it was for understanding. And understanding, my mind would translate as some body of knowledge, or some specific set of experiences, or some final explanation that was going to resolve all my questions, all my doubts. Everything would make sense. It's really only something to have so that there's nothing to worry or wonder about anymore. Some *something*, you know. And of course, some proof, at least, that we're getting somewhere other than here, whatever that might be in each of our minds.

And of course, as I'm sure you know I'm going to say, it's just the opposite—that the closer we look to find this explanation, this body of knowledge, this set of experiences that we can use to satisfy our mind that we've gotten it, the closer we look for this knowledge, for something concrete to take refuge in, the more we don't find anything.

One of my teachers would say, "When you don't look, you see samsara. When you look, you don't see anything."

That's really how it is.

This little article—some of you have heard me read this before—to me it's a metaphor of our practice, of our search for some knowledge and understanding. It's a science article about the nature of the universe.

A couple of years ago, some scientists discovered a new galaxy, the largest galaxy ever detected. And by the way, even on the news last night, they were talking about this: there are one hundred billion galaxies that they know of—one hundred billion. And our galaxy, only one of them, has something like one hundred billion stars. It's unthinkable. Anyway, somehow they discovered a new galaxy, the largest one

ever discovered, which has one hundred trillion stars—sixty times the size of Earth's galaxy, the Milky Way.

So that just sets the stage.

This new galaxy is located in the center of an even larger clump of one thousand galaxies called Abel 2029. And in studying these galaxies, scientists hope that further study will provide clues to the role played by a mysterious substance called dark matter. Because there doesn't appear to be enough ordinary, regular matter in the universe to account for the gravitational forces that would be necessary to clump all these galaxies together. So they propose the existence of vast amounts of invisible matter that eludes detection because it emits no radiation.

According to the prevailing wisdom, ninety-nine percent of the universe consists of this missing mass. Ninety-nine percent. Which means that what is generally thought of as astronomy actually concerns only a tiny subset of particles that happen to be detectable by the human nervous system.

I think it's like that when we begin to really explore our mind-body process. Ninety-nine percent of it, we don't have a clue what's really going on. The more we look for answers, the more we discover mystery, unknowing.

And so what I want to talk a bit about tonight is taking refuge in radical acceptance, radical faith, radical trust.

Once I read somewhere—I forget where—a definition of faith as the drive towards that which cannot be described.

I really like that. It takes faith out of the realm of definition and intellect—the movement of heart towards that which cannot be described.

You'll probably remember when Joseph spoke about faith some time ago, about this aspect of faith first arising in us, which is often called bright faith. That sense of brightness, confidence of heart and mind, almost as if internally something lights us up, energizes us. It brings us to explore. It brings us to practice. It's really a wonderful mental state, a wonderful feeling. And it can come from hearing some teacher, from talking to somebody. It can come from being in nature. It can come from an experience of suffering that one somehow transcends or transforms into something very profound.

I'm sure—maybe not—but at times reflect on the first arising of this bright faith for yourself, because I find that can often inspire energy and confidence. And of course it fades, but it's not a one-time experience. Even here, you can notice often the reawakening of this state of bright faith. I experience it so many times in interviews, talking with people, just seeing the inner light as somebody is opening to a new aspect of how things are. Somebody is letting go of some pain, some long-held idea, some way that suffering is being created. Or when I see the power of metta, somebody's kindness. Just the way that one

of you can inspire another one of you. The incredible dedication you're all putting out—really, it's a gift for us as teachers to be able to meet with all of you daily as you go through your process. Even though sometimes bright faith might be the last thing you think is emanating, and sometimes it is the last thing that's emanating, many other times—more than you'd realize—I get such a hit of this inspiration from talking with each of you.

One thing about bright faith, one way that we often can misplace it, is that that first brightness feels like a reawakening in us of a recognition of truth, a recalling us to our truest nature. And sometimes we take that faith, that bright lit-up place, and instead of seeing it as a calling back to our own truth—that we are an expression of truth—it can be easy to direct it outwards, to turn it into blind faith. Faith in the person who inspired it, faith in the teachings. I don't mean that we can't trust people and teachings, but this blind faith that says, "I can only feel awakened and enlivened if my teacher is with me, or if I can somehow hold on to teachings in a certain way." It's again a looking outside of ourselves, a giving away of our own potential to awaken to truth, saying, "I need this other being, this other teacher, this other situation, whatever it might be." And then it turns into blind faith.

Someone told me once about one of her teachers. She said, "You know, I trust him so much. If he told me to jump off a cliff, I would do it without thinking." I thought, oh—that could possibly be blind faith. So blind that it doesn't really look to see what's true in each moment.

So bright faith—never mind blind faith—but bright faith of course is not stable. It wavers because it's at first dependent on something outside. What's wonderful about this practice is that as the faith energizes us and gives us the confidence to sit down and look, then through our own personal moment-to-moment experience, bright faith changes or is strengthened by verified faith. This faith means confidence in what we know to be true through our own experience.

This is what many of us love in particular about the teachings of the Buddha as they are in the Pali suttas. There's that very famous line he said often, *ehi passiko*—that's Pali, which translates roughly as "you too, come and see." He said many times, don't believe anything just because I say so, just because someone that you respect or revere says so—and he goes through a long list. He says, but if you hear it and it sounds helpful or good, then come and see for yourself. Try for yourself and see what is true. See what leads to less suffering, what leads to more suffering.

So verified faith is what arises out of this seeing what is actually true for ourselves. And something you know from your own experience to be true—anyone telling you otherwise, it just doesn't matter, because you know. You don't get upset about it. You don't get defensive about it. You just know this is true, and I'm sorry you don't know that.

Of course this gets tricky, and that's what I'm going to get into in a minute. It leads me to the radical aspect of faith or trust, because this verified faith so easily—what is true, what my experience tells me is true—so easily becomes faith in what? It can again become faith in something concrete.

I'll give you an easy example of how easy it is to slip from this really radical trust and faith into forming a view, an opinion, and attaching, grasping at that view and mistaking that for truth—which hopefully will make sense by the time I finish this talk.

For example, you might have an experience in the moment: strong pain, the mind suffering, and just simply with mindfulness, being with it, there's an easing of the mental tension. At a point the mind goes into equanimity, and maybe the pain completely goes away. And even before the pain went away, there was an ease in the mind, and you know in that moment: ah, there's a real difference between pain and suffering. Physical pain does not have to be mental suffering. And you know that, absolutely, in that moment. It was an intuitive experience, which of course our mind will then put into words, a way of describing it to ourselves.

So easily that experience can then be taken, remembered, solidified, and become a view—that when pain arises, if I pay attention correctly, the mind will get calm and the pain will go away. So easily we can make that slip, that little movement from just being open to the experience as it is, just resting in that pain with spacious awareness, to holding the view that if I do it right, my mind will be easy and the pain will go away. And then of course, the next time—or the tenth time—that doesn't happen, we start to feel confused or struggling, and there's more suffering. At this point, we've confused verified faith, faith in what we know is true, with attachment to a view. And this is very tricky.

The Buddha spoke about this realm of attachment: when there's contact, there's feeling of pleasantness or unpleasantness, which leads to craving, wanting, and in the next moment it strengthens the wanting into grasping or clinging or attachment—just a stronger movement of craving. He talked about different areas of this, sense pleasures being one, of course. The second area is attachment to views and opinions. He spoke an awful lot about this, so I'm going to return to it a little later.

First I want to say what I actually mean by true radical faith or trust. It's really trust and confidence not that something particular will or should happen, but that truth, that real refuge in the Dharma, is found within this moment, with resting within this particular experience, whatever it might happen to be, just as it is. Faith gives us the confidence that we can truly open and find refuge in this moment, in this experience. And the real faith is that we know truth and freedom is only here, and never anywhere else. We forget it, but that's what faith can bring us back to.

This radical acceptance—I read somewhere once—radical acceptance is radical acknowledgement of the presence of truth at this very moment. The only thing to do is to do nothing but accept truth in all things, as all things, at all times, in all forms, in all ways. To let go, to accept, it is necessary only to give up your concerns, your ideas, and your fears. I admit that's not so easy. Necessary only to give up your fears. So what have you been fearing today? Trying to control, not able or even recognizing its presence to radically accept? Because radical acceptance is this faith to surrender completely into this moment—to live consciously in not knowing, not controlling, and not being able to organize things so that they happen the

way we think they ought to. And that is scary for us a lot of the time.

We definitely want facts, some kind of certainty. If I do this, then that will happen. Or if I'm sleepy, it's because of X, Y, and Z, and if I do A, B, and C, the sleepiness will go away. And of course, to some extent we need some facts. We need to hear other people's experience. We need some guidance, some idea of helpful ways to practice, something to go on. No question about that. But when we again begin to mistake ideas, helpful suggestions, or how things might tend to happen in the usual sense—when we mistake any of these for absolute truth, this is the way it is—when we begin to try and take refuge in any of these so-called facts, in any of these ways of practice, we're going to find ourselves suffering. We're going to find ourselves in confusion at some point.

Living in not knowing, though, is very unsettling. And generally in this culture especially, I find it's set up in a way to really hide the fact that we don't have a clue what's going to happen in the next moment. Actually we don't, but our culture is set up so we can really avoid facing this for large portions of time.

A couple years ago I spent three months in India. On reflection when I came back, it was so interesting, because something about India doesn't let one take refuge in the assumption that if I plan out the day, that's how it's going to be. In fact, after a while I realized whatever I thought was going to happen that day would be the one thing that probably wouldn't happen. So if I thought I'd get up, go here, go to the post office, go have a chai—probably not. Maybe I'd have the chai. That was usually first on the list. But the other things weren't up to me.

It can be extremely frustrating, and it was for quite a while. And then suddenly I realized: this is just how life is anyway. The only problem is I think I should be able to have my plans work. Give it up. And it got to be very delightful—like just dancing. Get up and make my plans and then throw it all in the air and see what really happens today. It's fun. It's much more enlivening. Much more like I was dancing with life.

When I came back here—and I'm the same way myself—everyone I know has day planners and hour planners. And even more amazingly, most of the time that stuff happens. Like right now, I know where I'm supposed to be almost every day of 1996.

And every other year, that's actually happened. I mean, that is to me the miracle more than anything else. But it can really lull me into this sense that feels like security. It feels like comfort, a sense of somewhere to rest. I can look in my little day book and know where I was on August 15th and where I'll be next August 15th. My life has some order. All's right in the universe, that kind of thing. It seems like a comfort, but really it's a great enforcer of delusion on a big level.

The same tendency goes on here in retreat, or in our minds, on much more subtle levels. I'm sure you've probably planned where you're going to be every day for 1996 too—but not taking it so seriously. Bringing it down right to here, the way this retreat is structured can also give us a false sense that everything is very orderly. We know what's going to happen next. The bells and the time and the meals are served at

the same time every day. If it's ten minutes late, it's a huge upheaval. Why was it so odd to come in here and have pumpkins? Because something was different. After six weeks, something was different in here when you came in, because it seemed so worldly. And of course the truth is, who knows what's going to happen in this next moment? When you sit down in your next sitting, when you stand up and go to the next walking?

It's scary to live consciously in this not knowing. It can be scary if we're caught in wanting security, if we're looking for some explanation, some knowledge to use as a final resting place, to take a stand in. I'm not saying to just intellectually tell yourself, "Okay, now I don't know what's going to happen next," and keep reminding yourself until you make yourself totally anxious. That's just another view. You don't really have to do anything except keep paying attention, because our practice is a moment-to-moment experience of this fact. It's a practice of radical trust. And that's why sometimes this practice can be so uncomfortable, why things can feel so scary. When something you've thought—without even knowing you thought it—about how things are gets suddenly blasted apart by an experience, it's like for an instant there is nowhere to take a stand.

I have a friend who described once, years ago, having an anattā experience, an experience of no-self, which many people have. It's not like you have one and everything's over, but we often have little experiences of no-self. He said it was like he went out for a Sunday drive, but then there was nowhere to go home to. That sense of—where's the reference point? We want so much to have one reference point that we can always look back to, to hold on to.

So this radical trust is the recognition that our true refuge, our true home—there actually is always somewhere to go home to. But it's in this very moment, in this very experience, that we can discover our true home: the radiant nature of heart, of mind. As long as we're looking to some set experience, we're missing our true home. But because this home has no description, no particular ways to recognize it always, because it's within constantly changing experience, it's so hard for us. We want to get a handle on it. It's hard to just surrender into this moment with total confidence that this is taking refuge in the Dharma.

As our practice continues—and it's happening for everyone here—we more and more come to trust that this is where home really is. But at times, like my friend's experience, or when we begin to lose our reference points, it can be extremely unsettling. It's like being in an earthquake.

One time, some of us here were teaching and cooking and sitting at Yucca Valley in California. We have a big retreat every spring, and towards the end of this ten-day retreat we had a pretty big earthquake—a 6.1 or something. I'd never been in an earthquake before. The first part was interesting. I was standing outside in the desert at night, and it was just a little scary, but also sort of far out to see the ground roll and everything shake. But then these aftershocks, which are really little earthquakes, kept going every few minutes—every three, four, or five minutes all night and into the next couple of days. It stopped being far

out and fun pretty quickly. You're just falling asleep and everything shakes. And of course the radio would always say, "35% chance of the big one," which is really a big help. So you can't just say it's an aftershock—it might be the big one. You have to wake up.

What was interesting to me was to see how, on every level, not just my mind—actually my body felt more jangled and upset than my mind. It was visceral. The body thought it could trust the earth.

to be solid, to be there. Guess what? No.

It was a really interesting experience, and I think for me it was very much an absolute all-senses experience of the fact that there really is no concrete place to take a stand. The scary part about that was I wanted it to be different, of course. I didn't want this to be happening. I wanted the earth to stay like I always thought it should be. And when it didn't, I suffered.

When we start trying to control the results, when this happens in our meditation, so easily we get into manipulating meditation. You know what I mean, I'm sure. Either you've had a really good experience, which immediately the mind translates as "this is how it's supposed to be and I'm doing it right." And then we try to recreate every situation that seemed to have an effect on that particular state—the time of day to sit, what you ate for lunch, where you walked, how long you walked, what you're wearing, your posture, how you hold your head. We try to get back into that good sitting again. Just take three breaths, then let it go, then open to hearing—we get it all down. Or just the reverse, of course, if you had an awful experience, trying to do everything different from whatever led to that.

Without looking at it closely, we really think that we're trying to meditate correctly, that we're looking towards truth. But look at your state of heart, your state of mind, when you find yourself involved in manipulating meditation. Is there a sense of confidence, of trust and openness to the moment, to experience? Personally, I've experienced a contraction, a real kind of tightness, a leaning forward, fearful actually, wanting. It actually strengthens the sense of isolation, of separateness, and quite likely leads into striving, self-judgment, frustration. There is no room in manipulating meditation to recognize our inner radiance. There's no space to recognize that our true refuge is here, because we're so busy trying to recreate whatever idea we have of good meditation that's going to take us to truth.

And of course, this is what can drive us nuts, because we all have the opposite experience. After the manipulation, the striving, the frustration—hopefully before we've completely driven ourselves into a tight mess of suffering—at some point you realize, "Oh, right, just let it go." Just be with things as they are, and space opens up. Peace is possible. There's a sense of ease and happiness. We know that. We all know that, but still so easily we slip out of that knowing.

When we're in that space of acceptance, when we are able to surrender with this trust, with this faith, no matter what's happening, we're open again to the wonder—the wonder of ourselves, the wonder of the world. It's when you walk outside and marvel: how can nature be so beautiful and so fragile and so

powerful, so cruel? How can our hearts be so infinitely tender one moment and so unbelievably hardened an hour later? How can each of us be able to bear the immense suffering that each person bears in their own particular life pattern, and then turn around and be so joyous at something simple like the chickadees landing? It's really beautiful when we open to the wonder in this way.

And that's what this radical trust is—it's the gift that it gives us. There's no one thing we can hold to, but it's the trust that allows us to open into the infinite mystery, the infinite wonder and beauty of life.

I don't mean to be naive or simplistic, suggesting that if we open, if we trust, everything from now on will be wonderful and happy and nothing bad will ever happen again. Of course I don't mean that at all. Because again, that would be looking for some result, for some proof. It's easy to relax into the joyous moments. It's very difficult to find this trust when something difficult is happening.

I thought I'd read this from the Buddha. To me it's an acknowledgement that the difficult is often not what it seems—that even the difficult, when surrendered to, is the opening to truth. This is from a sutta called the Transcendental Dependent Arising. Remember on Saturday, Steve talked about the classical dependent origination, about how ignorance is the origin of suffering, those twelve links. This is another series of twelve links the Buddha gave that starts from the endpoint of the first. Suffering is the first link in this dependent origination. So it begins with what's truly difficult, what we would have trouble opening to.

I'm not going to explain each of these. I just want you to hear that suffering can be the causal condition for something quite other. Suffering is the supporting condition for faith. Faith is the supporting condition for joy. Joy is the supporting condition for rapture. Rapture is the supporting condition for tranquility.

Tranquility for happiness. Happiness is the supporting condition for concentration. That's right—happiness is the supporting condition for concentration, not striving, tightness, or teeth gritting. Happiness is the supporting condition for concentration. Concentration is the supporting condition for the knowledge and vision of things as they really are, which goes on to support disenchantment, dispassion, and the supporting condition for emancipation.

Beginning with suffering. It doesn't say get rid of suffering and then this stuff can happen.

I find this really fascinating. This is a way that views and teachings can be helpful—if they give us some confidence to again look and see for ourselves. So don't believe it. Look and see for yourself. Can we trust in a particular moment that even this suffering can be the seed of opening to truth?

Often in life when something difficult happens, we think, "Oh, this is horrible, this shouldn't be happening." And often when we look back years later, we wouldn't have chosen it, but it actually led to very beneficial effects. This happens a lot in my life.

Just as an example, when I got quite sick a few years ago, it made me look more carefully at how I was

living my life. Without actually knowing what I was doing that might have contributed to the sickness, by looking more closely and really accepting the experience as it was, it caused me to make some radical changes in how I was living, how I was relating to my life—changes that have been wonderful and have led to things I could never have imagined.

We think we can plan our life, plan the next five years, plan our retirement. And we do our best. But I've found that what really happens, I couldn't have thought it up in my wildest dreams. And often it's much better than I could have imagined.

For example, I think partly as a result of the sickness and the changes I made, I now live behind a study center in a really cute little cottage that didn't even exist then. I remember about ten years ago, what's now the study center was a farmhouse, and the family that lived there—their dog used to come up here all the time. She was sort of part of the staff. We would house sit for them and take care of their dog when they went away. I have a very clear memory of sitting in their backyard, which was lovely, peaceful. I could never have sat there and said, "Well, in six years this will be a study center, and I'll be living in a cottage that hasn't been built yet back here. That's what I think I'll try and manifest." I couldn't think of that in my wildest dreams. It's amazing how stuff happens.

So we don't really know, but we sure as heck want to know—what's going to happen, what has happened, and how to explain it all. This is where we get into grasping at views, clutching at views. The way it's described, grasping at views is the tendency of mind to think, "This is true, this is how it is. Everything else is false. Every other explanation is not accurate." That's a little hard and fast. But without putting it quite so clearly, we are doing this all the time.

The Buddha talked quite a lot about this, actually—many of his suttas address the dangers and suffering that arise from people clinging to views. Here is one example: "For one who is free from views, there are no ties. For one who is delivered by understanding, there are no follies. But those who grasp after views and philosophical opinions, they wander about in the world annoying people."

You might have thought the Buddha was a sober guy, but he had his funny sides.

Now, mind you, we're talking about grasping at views. Of course we have to hold views and opinions—we couldn't function in the world. But when we cling to them with that attitude of "this is true, everything else is false," it limits our world, it limits our possibilities. We don't even perceive that things could be otherwise.

There are ten million examples of this in daily life. We can see so often how grasping at views causes so much strife and suffering. Politics is a great example. Next week is Election Day in this country, and there aren't actually any big elections. But I notice for myself there are two particular politicians—whom I won't name—and if I just see them come on the TV, I get almost nauseated. There's no way I can hear what they say with any kind of openness. They could say something really great.

All I have to do is see them, and my view is so hardened. "This person is so bad for the country," I think. "I'm right, they're wrong. They couldn't possibly do something beneficial." Cut and dried. Finished.

And I know I'm probably quite mild in this, because I'm not a very politically active person. Just look at what goes on in the rest of the world. But to see how blinding that is, how strong that feeling of "I'm right." Think about the times when you're so sure you're right. How hard is it when someone comes along and says, "Well, you know, that's a view and an opinion. Can you see the other side?" Don't tell me that's a view and an opinion. I *know*.

Views can be really strong—so strong that they can cut through all kinds of other experience. For instance, the view of being a particular nationality, being American, or the sense of "my country, right or wrong."

There's a kind of funny story. A friend of mine who's German told me he once took some visiting friends in Munich to this big tourist attraction, the Hofbräuhaus, which is a huge beer hall. I don't know if Germans even go there, but all the tourists do. And there are a lot of American soldiers, army people, in Germany. So he was there with his friends when some American army guys—they must have been in uniform—got into a big fight. Punching and cursing, really a very physical fight. And my friend saw the manager or someone tip a note to the oompa band that was playing along this whole time. Immediately, without a break, they swung into "The Star-Spangled Banner." Clearly this was not a one-time event. And as soon as the national anthem started, these guys stopped their vicious fight, stood up with tears running down their eyes—all "my country, right or wrong." Really powerful.

Being attached to views can hide us from the truth. It doesn't let us see what's really going on. I read just recently that in 1988, in the Soviet Union—this must have been after Gorbachev came in but before it broke up—the Soviet authorities canceled all national history exams. They acknowledged that through all the years of lies and changing history to meet the prevailing view of the country, of that particular government, the actual history had become lost. And so they couldn't in conscience hold history exams because they didn't even know what the history was. Interesting. I didn't know that.

And of course, holding to views can lead to enormous suffering. Enormous violence has been carried out in the world because of attachment to views and the fear and anger that comes up when our views are threatened. Many wars are this, of course.

I've been reading lately a very interesting history of the American civil rights movement in the South in the late 1950s and early 1960s, around Martin Luther King, during the time of John F. Kennedy. I was a young girl then, so I didn't really know so much about it. But just to see—it was basically a movement, if you're not American, coming out of the Southern Black churches, joined by some whites, trying to break the segregation. Because at that time, in public places, Blacks had to eat in separate places from whites, sit in separate places on the buses. That was truly how it was.

So it was a nonviolent campaign to break down the segregation laws—by sit-ins at lunch counters, by not

using the buses, by Blacks and whites riding together on interstate buses. And it was quite strongly nonviolent, trying to base itself in Gandhian principles. How frightening it was to white supremacists who were relying on that separation, who certainly held the view that it was right, that they were superior. There was so much fear in having that view challenged. There was all kinds of horrific violence—bombing of churches because the movement was coming out of churches, setting fire to buses that people were traveling on, bombing of people's houses, murders, lynchings. All because of having one's idea of how things should be challenged—even though the people in the civil rights movement were in no way physically threatening anybody. They were quite committed to nonviolence.

The power of views. As Thich Nhat Hanh says, you can kill five or ten people with a gun, but somebody really holding tight to a view, if they get in a position of power, has the power to hurt millions of people. Views are so strong.

So that's on the biggest picture. But of course, we have the same tendencies in our minds—to manufacture views and explanations of experience, of how things should be—and often we don't recognize them. So are we willing to begin in our practice to truly look? Not that views are wrong, not that opinions and explanations are wrong—of course not. They're very helpful. But it's important to recognize a view as view, not to mistake an opinion, an explanation, or a view for a totally accurate description of reality.

There's no view we can hold to, that we can cling to forever, that will not bring us suffering and confusion. Any view is relative. See, we're back to the shaky ground again.

We want some view that isn't relative. Are we willing—can we live without holding to any view at all?

This is from Suzuki Roshi, the Zen master. He's dead now, but he wrote quite wonderful things. He says, "I've discovered that it is necessary, absolutely necessary, to believe in nothing." He's being quite radical here. "No matter what God or doctrine you believe in, if you become attached to it, your belief will be based more or less on a self-centered idea." Because of course attachment is self-centered. "So then you strive for a perfect faith in order to save yourself. You will be involved in an idealistic practice. In constantly seeking to actualize your ideal, you will have no time for composure."

I love the way he puts that, because exactly when we've become attached to some doctrine, we start striving to actualize that, we become involved in idealistic practice, trying to get our practice to meet some ideal, and then there's no time for composure.

I really love in my own practice looking at how views form, how I get attached to them, how I see through them, and how immediately the next instant another view comes up. It's really amazing. If we can see through them, it's not a problem.

How often here in the morning question period, or in something we say in a talk, or in instructions—we hear someone else describing something in their practice and immediately, without recognizing it, a view can come up: "Oh, is that what's supposed to be happening? My practice isn't like that." Or, "Oh, that

happened to me last week, but now I know that it's supposed to be the way it's happening this week." Or, "Last time I sat, the breath was so fine and refined and everything was quiet, and now I'm just being washed in waves of emotion—this is wrong and that was right." Or vice versa.

It's really great from the side of getting to listen to so many people, because it just makes me see there is no one right way that practice can ever manifest. Everybody's so different. Sometimes right after each other, someone will come in saying, "I'm just having too many emotions. I can't practice because there's too many emotions." And someone else will come in and say, "I can't practice because there's no emotions." Someone says, "I can't feel the breath—there's too many thoughts." Someone says, "I can only feel the breath. I wish I had something else happening." I'm exaggerating a little, but not that much.

And to see how as soon as a certain sitting has clear mindfulness, it's like, "Ah, that's how it's supposed to be." And then it forms into a view. Or, "I'm suffering, I'm struggling," and suddenly there's letting go. "Ah, right, that's how it's supposed to be." Just watching one view fall, another come up. One view falls, another comes up. Really, really fascinating to me.

Even to have the idea that practice means it should be intensive practice—sometimes we have to so let go of the view we have of practice that we wouldn't even recognize what we're doing as meditation practice. That's a real challenge. At different times, each of us might meet a place where what's happening is either so powerful or so intense or so scary that our practice has to take a form we couldn't even think of as intensive practice. Generally, the tendency is to think, "I can't practice, I'm failing." But actually, that person might be meeting the most difficult, challenging aspect of living in trust of anybody here. Who knows?

There's no one view of practice or anything that we can cling to. We can use them, but not mistake them for the truth.

Even the teachings of the Buddha—anything we say—notice how sometimes when we say something and it doesn't jibe with your experience at all, it's really different. How immediately the mind has to either make yourself wrong or make us wrong. There can't be a possibility that sometimes this is true and sometimes that is true. No, no, we've got to find out which is right and which is wrong. And often it's not that way.

The Buddha—this is another thing I love about him—he's not saying, "You've got to only trust me." In a very famous simile in one of his suttas, the simile of the raft, he talks of his teaching as a raft.

While you are practicing, you may hear the rain dropping from the roof in the dark. Later, the wonderful mist will be coming through the big trees. And still later, when people start to work, they will see the beautiful mountains. But some people will be annoyed if they hear the rain when they're lying in bed in the morning because they do not know that later they will see the sun rising from the east. If our mind is concentrated on ourselves, we have this kind of worry. But if we accept ourselves as the embodiment of

the truth, as Buddha nature, we will have no worry.

We can think, now it is raining, but we don't know what will happen in the next moment. By the time we go out, it may be a beautiful day or a stormy day. Since we don't know, we appreciate the sound of the rain now. This kind of attitude is the right attitude. If you understand yourself as a temporal embodiment of the truth, you will have no difficulty whatsoever. You appreciate your surroundings and you appreciate yourself as a wonderful part of Buddha's great activity, even in the midst of difficulties. This is our way of life.

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